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USDA Participates in Nearly 80% of Presidential eGovernment Initiatives

A central feature of the Expanding Electronic Government component of President Bush's Management Agenda, the 24 Presidential eGovernment Initiatives are cross-agency and government-wide solutions designed to better serve citizens and save taxpayer dollars. These initiatives are coordinated by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) with the stewardship of the President's Management Council, on which Deputy Secretary Moseley serves.

USDA is a partner in 19 of the 24 initiatives—one of the highest participation rates of any Cabinet department or independent agency. Reflecting the broad range of the Department's missions, the initiatives in which USDA participates include:

- Citizen-focused services such as GovBenefits (Web-based eligibility screening) and Recreation One-Stop (a recreation portal);
- Business-oriented services including eGrants (a grants portal) and Federal Asset Sales; and
- Services aimed at employees and internal efficiency including GoLearn (government-wide eLearning), ePayroll, and Enterprise HR Integration.

Two initiatives, GovBenefits and GoLearn, have already been launched. GovBenefits (www.govbenefits.gov) provides a single destination for citizens to find government benefits for which they are eligible as well as contact information to begin the application process. Currently, more than two dozen USDA programs are included on the site, and more are added each month. GoLearn (www.golearn.gov) provides a shared curriculum that all Federal employees can access as well as limited learning management tools to help employees and managers track training needs. USDA has already leveraged the site to provide required security training, saving the Department thousands of dollars.

To coordinate its support for the 19 initiatives in which the Department participates, USDA created a Presidential

Initiatives task force, composed of all of the agency personnel leading USDA's representation on each initiative. These individuals also monitor USDA's financial and human resource contributions to the initiatives.

More information about the Presidential Initiatives and the President's Management Agenda is available on the OMB Web site at www.whitehouse.gov/omb and at www.egov.gov; more information on USDA's participation is available from the eGovernment Team at www.egov.usda.gov.

President's Management Agenda Scorecard — USDA Gets Green, Again

To measure agencies' performance on achieving the five components of the President's Management Agenda (Expanding Electronic Government, Strategic Use of Human Capital, Budget and Performance Integration, Competitive Sourcing, and Improved Financial Performance), OMB issues a quarterly scorecard rating each Federal agency on its performance and progress.

For the past three quarters, USDA has received a "green" rating on the eGovernment progress measure of the scorecard, reflecting the significant progress on eGovernment the Department and its agencies have made over the past year. Specifically, the rating includes progress on USDA and Presidential eGovernment initiatives, IT capital planning, enterprise architecture, and cyber security. "This rating is the result of a lot of hard work by everyone involved in eGovernment at the Department, including members of the eGovernment Working Group and Executive Council, members of Smart Choice business case teams, and many others throughout USDA who have pursued the goals of the President's Management Agenda and USDA's eGovernment Strategic Plan" said Chris Niedermayer, USDA eGovernment Executive.

More information on the President's Management Agenda Scorecard is available on the OMB Web site at www.whitehouse.gov/omb and USDA's eGovernment site at www.egov.usda.gov.

USDA Makes Progress toward Government Paperwork Elimination Act Compliance

The Government Paperwork Elimination Act (GPEA), passed by Congress in 1998, requires USDA and other federal agencies to provide an electronic option, where practicable, when collecting information from the public. Examples of information collections range from farm loan applications to National Agricultural Statistics Service surveys, and animal health certifications to National Forest visitors' permit forms.

The deadline to comply with GPEA is October 2003, only one year away. To assess USDA's progress toward meeting this deadline, OMB asked the Department to provide a summary progress report on GPEA compliance, as well as detailed data on the status of and plans for automating each transaction. To comply with this mandate, the eGovernment Team used a collaborative process, working with each USDA agency to gather all necessary data to submit to OMB.

The completed report outlines the progress USDA has made to date, particularly the 15% of information collections covered by GPEA that have already been electronically enabled and the 58% of information collections currently scheduled to be automated by the 2003 deadline. Additionally, it outlines the other actions USDA has taken to support compliance with GPEA, including development of our eGovernment Strategic Plan and the progress on our Smart Choice initiatives; integration of GPEA planning into other IT planning activities, including Capital Planning and Investment Control and Agency eGovernment Tactical Planning; and the Department's successful initial rollout of the Service Center Agencies' eForms solution.

The report also identifies the key challenges to meeting the deadline, including lack of funding, inadequate infrastructure/technology, and citizen interactions not managed by USDA but by states or other Federal agencies.

A copy of the report, as sent to OMB, is available in the Team section of the USDA eGovernment Web site (www.egov.usda.gov). For more information on GPEA compliance at USDA, contact Nancy Sternberg at (202) 720-6746 or your agency's eGovernment Working Group representative.

In the Spotlight: Quality of Information

USDA is working hard to integrate eGovernment into new regulations and processes. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Department's implementation of new

Congressionally-mandated Quality of Information guidelines, released this October.

The guidelines ensure that USDA agencies use objective, useful, and accurate information to create reports and make program decisions, and that the Department issues high-quality data and publications. The guidelines also give citizens the opportunity to provide comment on information disseminated by USDA and request correction when they believe any information is inaccurate.

eGovernment, especially the use of the Internet as a communications medium, has been integrated into the information quality program. Specifically, USDA created a Web site (www.ocio.usda.gov/irm/qi_guide) which includes access to our final Information Quality Guidelines, future agency-specific guidelines, and an easy-to-understand explanation of the Department's procedure regarding requests for correction.

Further, citizens seeking correction of USDA information are able to use multiple channels, including letter, fax, or email, to notify the Information Quality official of the relevant USDA agency. Upon receiving a request for correction, regardless of the medium, USDA will make a thorough review and determine whether an amendment to the information or publication in question is warranted. The Information Quality Web site also contains information on how to appeal an agency's response, as well as information describing corrections USDA has made as a result of the correction procedures and/or appeals process.

In addition to the benefits to citizens, USDA's Information Quality Guidelines provide significant internal benefits. Specifically, they accelerate and improve the Department's ability to comply with the Federal records management requirements outlined in the Paperwork Reduction Act and Government Paperwork Elimination Act. This not only advances legislative compliance but also helps USDA achieve our eGovernment vision of a Department "electronically available any place, any time."

More information on the Department's Quality of Information guidelines is available from Bette Fugitt at (202) 690-2118 or at www.ocio.usda.gov/irm/qi_guide.

For more information on any of these topics, or for general comments or questions, contact the eGovernment Team at:

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